

The L.A. Times last Sunday contained the following special information about the James Earl Ray case: Just before sentencing, chief prosecutor Philip Canale told the jury it had taken him months "to prove to himself that it was not a conspiracy." Ray cut him off. Addressing the jury, he said, "I don't want to waste time. I just want to do something. I don't agree with the theory that there was no conspiracy." The Times goes on to report that the "hired hit man" theory, Philip Canale said, he never asked Ray point blank if he was part of a conspiracy. For Canale said, however, that he asked enough other questions to convince himself that Ray was not a hired gun.

That the deal went on is self-evident. Despite all the radio, critical questions asked and unanswered, no trial took place when Ray killed Oswald, that saved a lot of money and unnecessary questions then took in exchange for a risk of death, a 20-year sentence. Then the deal before in whose courtroom the deal was arranged makes the incredible statement that a trial "would have made out understanding of the conspiracy." "Whoever would want to kill Ray as the killer." And now as we go to press Ray does want to change things, does want to call the deal off, does want to change his plea.

PETER DAWNEY

The world is generally aware that some day last year James Earl Ray, alias Ramon George Sneyd, the accused slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King, was arrested at London Airport and thereafter extradited to Tennessee where he has just been sentenced to 99 years. Very few, however, know the real story of that arrest, and yet it is one of the most extraordinary episodes in all the annals of criminal detection, fictional or otherwise.

The conflicting and contradictory reports put out by the press at the time merely served to confuse the public, which was not in any case interested in separating fact from fiction. But astounding though it may seem, of the two principal versions of the story to get into print, neither was fiction, and both were in essence factual.

The facts are these: on May 28, 1968, a certain Ramon George Sneyd checked in at the New Earl's Court Hotel in London and checked out again June 5. He called a cab to take him to the air terminal and then flew to Lisbon. On the same day another character calling himself Ramon Sneyd checked in at the Pax Hotel in London and checked out again at 9 a.m. on June 8. Meanwhile the first Sneyd, (whom we shall refer to as Sneyd I from here on) flew back from Lisbon and arrived at London Airport at 6:10 a.m. on June 8.

One of the passengers on that flight told me of a curious incident that had occurred just before take-off. At first, an hour's delay had been announced and shortly afterwards a SPECIAL Trident flight from London had arrived. The flight to London was then called, the delay turning out to be only twenty minutes.

When the passengers had taken their seats and the doors were about to be closed, an official came running over from the airport building with another man. Breathlessly he asked the steward how many passengers on board. Ninety six was the reply. "Then you have room for one more," said the official, indicating the man with him. Since subsequent accounts all said that there were ninety six passengers on that plane, it is clear that the additional passenger was not on the passenger list.

On arrival in London, the passengers filed into the airport building along a raised catwalk. As they did so, they were scrutinized by two senior officers from the Flying Squad at Scotland Yard, Superintendent Butler and Inspector Thompson, both in plain clothes. Suddenly they stepped forward and accosted a man, asking him to step aside. A few minutes later he was hastily taken in a Flying Squad car to Cannon Row police station in central London. The arrest must have taken place at almost exactly 6:15 a.m.

Almost three hours later, the second Sneyd (Sneyd II from now on) left his hotel and made for London Airport. At 11:15 a.m. he passed through immigration and presented his passport, all unaware that a man who bore the same identity as himself had been arrested at the airport just exactly five hours previously. One look at the name in his passport was enough for the immigration official who immediately called in Scotland Yard's Special Branch which has an office at the airport. Detective Sergeant Philip Birch arrived and obviously had no alternative but to place the man under arrest. He was charged with carrying a forged passport and a loaded revolver.

The first news of the arrest came from FBI headquarters in Washington, which announced later that day that James Earl Ray had been apprehended at London Airport at 11:15 a.m. London time, 6:15 EDT after having flown in from Lisbon. This was confirmed 35 minutes later by Scotland Yard who put out the following statement which curiously omitted any reference to James Earl Ray.

Raymond George Sneyd born 8/10/32 Toronto, Canada, no fixed abode and no occupation was arrested at 11:15 a.m. on 8/6/68 at London Airport and later charged at Cannon Row with possessing a forged passport and possessing a firearm... Superintendent Butler and Inspector Thompson are in charge of the inquiry. The arrest was the result of liaison with the FBI, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and New Scotland Yard. The man was in transit through immigration on arrival from Lisbon on his way to another country.

The next day every newspaper in England and America had the story on its front page. Although the information from official sources had been brief, a number of newspapers were able to fill in the details from airline officials and other sources. Ray had arrived on flight BEA 075 which had landed at 6:10 a.m. In his pocket he had had a ticket for an onward flight to Brussels on a flight scheduled to leave at 7:50 a.m. How then, one might well have asked, could he have been arrested at 11:15. One or two journalists did make an effort to explain this strange anomaly, but their efforts were singularly unconvincing. And there was also another anomaly. Transit passengers do not have to pass through immigration unless for some reason they wish to leave the passenger lounge in which they wait for their onward flight.

It is doubtful, however, if anyone would have been troubled by these minor problems if it had not been for a journalist named Ian Colvin, of the DAILY TELEGRAPH, who happened to stumble across the true facts and very nearly gave the game away. Not that Colvin ever grasped the significance of his discovery for as a leading writer on a conservative paper he would never seek to attack the Establishment. That Sunday morning, as he read his newspaper, Colvin remembered that a certain Ramon Sneyd had persistently called him at his office the week before demanding to know how to become a mercenary in Africa. He had done so because of a series of articles which had recently appeared under Colvin's by-line concerning the ex-

plots of a mercenary officer named Major Wicks. Colvin had taken Sneyd's address and had promised to refer the matter to Major Wicks. The address given was the New Earl's Court.

Although Sneyd had made several attempts to call Colvin, he had actually reached him only twice, once June 4 and once June 6. On the second occasion he indicated that he had moved to the Pax Hotel. In his story, which appeared the next day, Colvin wrote: "When we first spoke, a Canadian or perhaps American voice said..." This is very significant because Sneyd I had a southern American accent and Sneyd II a Canadian accent. Colvin never realized that the second call had been placed by a different person pretending to be the same man as the first. That this is what happened it not guesswork but is based on independent evidence which space does not allow me to go into here.

Later that Sunday evening, Colvin, who as it happened did not have a leader to write that day, strolled over to the newsdesk and asked how the story on Sneyd was coming along. He was told that nothing could be learned from Scotland Yard. "Would you like me to do you a story?" he asked. "Such as?" they replied. "Well I can do you an interview," Colvin said. He then set off to visit the Pax and the New Earl's Court hotels. At the latter he found that the police had forestalled him and the receptionist wouldn't talk. But the police had been nowhere near the former and the landlady was only too ready to talk. Curiously enough, however, although she told Colvin that Sneyd had been there until 9 a.m. on Saturday morning, the day before, and thus could not have flown in from Lisbon, he made no mention of this in his story and only stated that Sneyd had been known to have been in London until at least the 6th of June, although a careful reading of his story made it quite clear that he had been there until at least the 7th, (i.e. the day before his arrest).

Colvin's story appeared on June 10 under the headline DR. KING SUSPECT HERE 3 WEEKS. Apart from an account of the telephone calls and the interview with the landlady it contained two interesting facts which could not possibly have come from anywhere else than Scotland Yard. The first was that Sneyd had been arrested by Special Branch officers, (i.e. not by the Flying Squad as virtually every paper had stated the day before) and the second was that he had been in England for 21 days before his arrest, having arrived on May 17. Where he had stayed between May 17 and May 28 was not and never has been made clear however.

We now come to the most astonishing part of the whole episode. On that very same day, June 10, the EXPRESS came out with a story which it treated as a scoop. In inch high type it carried the identical headline to the Colvin story: DR. KING SUSPECT HERE THREE WEEKS. "Contrary to first reports that he had arrived by plane at Heathrow only hours earlier," it said, "Yard officers have established he had been in London for about three weeks."

The EXPRESS also informed its readers that Scotland Yard

detectives had traced four addresses where Ray had stayed in London during those three weeks, though it carefully avoided mentioning any of them by name. The arrest had occurred because Special Branch men "making checks at London Airport spotted the name Sneyd typed on a passenger list for the 11:50 a.m. flight to Brussels."

There can be little doubt that this story was officially inspired because (a) the information was attributed directly to Scotland Yard, (b) it carried the by-line of the doyen of Fleet Street crime reporters, and (c) it was given banner headline treatment on the front page. Significantly, however, the NEW YORK TIMES of June 11 had a story which was also featured in the INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE of that date in which the following appeared: "Scotland Yard officials continue to maintain that Ray was arrested here on Saturday morning following his arrival from Portugal..."

Another story in these two papers dated London June 10, said: "Scotland Yard declined to confirm the reports, published in the DAILY TELEGRAPH and the DAILY EXPRESS... an FBI spokesman said that according to the bureau's information, Ray arrived in England on May 7, left the same day for Lisbon and flew back to London Saturday."

Despite the lack of confirmation from Scotland Yard, however, the news media accepted the new version of the story and have stuck to it ever since. The Trident jet from Lisbon and the brilliant detective work of the FBI have simply vanished. The arrest was the result of an "all ports" warning message about a man travelling in Europe under the name of Sneyd that was issued only two days earlier. Butler and Thompson have now been metamorphosed into Dept. Sgt. Philip Birch.

Thus it was that the embarrassing nature of Colvin's disclosures was made harmless. The technique was simply to change the story so as to fit the new facts that had been brought to light. It is a technique to which the student of assassinations rapidly becomes accustomed.

There is just one puzzling feature of the story. Why did Hoover announce the time of arrest as 11:15? At the time Colvin had not appeared on the scene and there was no reason to suppose that the second arrest could not be hushed up. One is forced to the conclusion that Hoover failed to take in that two arrests had been made, and that when the messages from London reached him he thought that the references to 6:15 and 11:15 merely alluded to the time difference between London and Washington which is exactly five hours. By an ironical twist, it turned out, it was this error which made it possible to render harmless disclosures which Colvin was to make and to conceal the fact of the second arrest by planting a story in the DAILY EXPRESS.

It is a national scandal, how many more times can the country tolerate political assassinations which are covered up? The issue calls for a new President's Commission, a new Warren Commission. But the Warren Commission should have proven to us that those days of investigation government, the government is not to be trusted to be impartial in any case where the truth stumbles over the traces of the CIA, the FBI, or the Man from U.N.C.I. E. Perhaps the only hope of truth would be a non-governmental committee of independent scholars. How about Chesney, Leigh Mac Donald, Mark Lane, Bertrand Russell, Jim Garrison, Jerry Rubin, Larry Lipson and Eldridge Cleaver, for starters.

A London publisher proves there may be two James Earl Rays